10: Sen K-3, 4 (ca. 1955) 1962 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

gave way to the development of agriculture over an extremely limited area in South Andaman — paddy cultivation and coconut plantations have succeeded quite well. The plantations of rubber, tea and coffee also developed in the South Andaman over very small areas but ultimately did not prove very successful, partially due to the lack of adequate care. Simultaneously with the settlement of the refugees, new areas are being brought under plough which had never been interfered with human hands. The growth of agriculture based on rice cultivation together with vegetable gardening, development of orchards, coconut cultivation will bring about self-sufficiency of the islands and make the people self-supporting.

Industrial development of any big scale cannot be foreseen except the lumbering industry because of the lack of resources, power and also of any appreciable home market. Besides lumbering, the fishing industry, if properly co-ordinated with the mainland, can be developed to a great extent. A number of cottage industries based on coconuts, sea and forest products have developed, of which the coirmaking has developed most.

The characteristics, common to the tropical islands, are to a large degree manifested in these islands. The physical environment suffers from a number of limitations. Hot and humid climate is ameliorated by the influence of the sea in all parts as none of them are more than 10 miles away from the sea. The problems of soil are quite tremendous and such signs are only discernible to a small extent in the islands which might share greater proportions in the future if adequate measures of careful cultivation are not undertaken. The natural vegetation should be carefully preserved and regenerated after the felling of the trees not only for the conservation of the vegetation but also for saving the soil from the serious consequences of erosion. The cultural environment is a mosaic of variety because of the different types of people who have been living in these islands, however negligible their number might be. The imbalance of regional growth, being exclusively confined to the South Andaman, is being removed with the growth of settlement in the other parts of the islands and the indications of the shift in gravity of the economic interests is synchronising with the progress of settlement in the North and Middle Andamans. Mayabunder is handling a greater share in the movement of commodities and passengers. Such changes are undoubtedly very much welcome as the lowering of the disparities in the regional economy and growth speak of an all-round regional development.

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

It is impossible to imagine a more varied or richer sight than the Andamanese forests at any time of year. The colours, and the light effects, particularly at dawn and at sunset, the myriads of flowers of every hue and scent, every shape and size, the strange noises, all combine to produce an effect which stuns the outsider. The spectacle reaches its climax at night when the moon is full; the tops of the trees are bathed in a silver light and the great lianas seem to writhe like serpents. As though inspired by the light, the nocturnal animals stage a kind of pageant for the occasion and their cries are even more frequent and more rhythmic than usual. The Andamanese themselves seem bewitched without realizing it, spellbound by the weird atmosphere.

To anyone unfamiliar with the tropics, the swift change from darkness to light and back again comes as a surprise. Night in the tropics is never silent – the eerie voices and calls, often with a strange pitch, seem to cease for a brief moment just before the sudden onset of darkness and again just before the return of the light. As night falls the fascination of the jungle grows. Even the natives feel some urge to keep their voices down, as if out of respect for some natural solemnity. (This, however, is not exclusive to the Andamanese, and it has a perfectly rational explanation. In tropical forests, and in the deserts, men speak softly so as to catch every slightest sound, a passing animal perhaps.) At dawn the birds start up as though they were tired of silence. There is no great variety of calls; most are very piercing, although still pleasing, and in the crescendo of sound which follows the dusk and dawn silences, the forest is transformed.

One thing that has helped the Onges to survive so long despite the inevitability of their decline is the climate of the islands, which is usually very pleasant and so less liable to exacerbate biological weaknesses.

Normally, the Andamans have four months of very good weather from December to March, which may extend by a few days into November and April. February is nearly always the driest month and the calmest, although there are exceptions, as I know from my own experiences when trying to land on the island. In the remaining months there is frequent rain, sometimes torrential, with raging seas, but relieved by periods of clear sky.

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

In the absence of rain the air is clear with few extremes of temperature, and mean temperatures are fairly constant throughout the year. Towards the end of March and throughout April, the thermometer rarely rises above twenty-five degrees centigrade in the shade, although it can rise above thirty-five degrees centigrade in the middle of the day. Heavy rains, which reduce the temperature noticeably, begin in mid-April; but a period of relatively dry, almost cold weather may occur at the beginning of May. The south-west monsoon reaches its peak in the middle of May, and continues to the end of November. During this period the temperature is never high, but the rains are frequently torrential; storms and terrific gales follow one after another and in some years the monsoons are so violent that the trees are completely stripped of their leaves in a matter of hours. Even so, there are sudden calms and in August there may be some very fine days, among the best of the year when they occur.

This climate, with its very minor variations in temperature, is explained by the geographical position of the islands. The two main islands of the archipelago run north–south, between 10° 30′ and 13° 30′ North and 90° and 92° 33′ East, rarely over forty kilometres wide. Great Andaman alone is three hundred and twenty kilometres long and Little Andaman is fifty kilometres. With the south-west monsoon the west coast faces the brunt of the storms, while the north-east monsoon hits the eastern coastline. Both hit the islands after crossing vast expanses of the Indian Ocean, but the south-west monsoon is the wetter; together they refresh the highly fertile earth.

Little Andaman forms about a sixth of this area. Its southernmost point touches 10° 30′ North and the northern tip is 10° 56′ North. On the west coast the monsoon winds are so strong and go on for so long that they have affected the growth of vegetation, beating the tops of the trees down towards the north-east, while both monsoons carry the sea spray right across the island.

With the continual dampness and relatively even temperature the forests rise before one as the coastline approaches, black, savagely beautiful, unconquered and unconquerable. Like all the rain forests of the tropics they are always a lush green, except where the monsoon has stripped the trees of their leaves. Normally the trees do not lose their leaves in the winter; each species has its